

A Revolutionary Introduction to the VSM and the Potential of Disaster Anarchism

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1 Some Definitions

The Viable System Model (VSM) is a tool derived from cybernetic principals that simplifies the analysis of systems for viability. To understand why this is valuable to the revolutionary organizer, it's important to define a few words.

The word "cybernetics" is rich in the popular imagination, but the popular conception is almost entirely, if not entirely, disconnected from the technical definition of the field. The definition of the field of cybernetics was originally coined as the "theory or study of communication and control." Cybernetics is the study of meta control systems. Let's unpack that a bit.

"Cyber" comes from the Latinized Greek root of "kybernan" or meaning "steering or piloting a ship." Cybernetics is not the study of steering a ship, nor the theory of ship steering, but one level of abstraction above that. It is the study of all systems of governance, within natural organisms, machines, natural phenomenon, or any other system.

What is a system? A system is simply any set of things that interact such that they elicit a unified behavior. A wave is a system. The solar system is a system. A person riding a bicycle is a system. A government is a system. A social organization is a system. A human is a system.

Systems can be (and often are) recursive, such that many systems can be broken into subsystems. The solar system has multiple planetary systems, with moons and other objects. Each planetary system has it's own environment, which is a system. Some of these interact, some don't. A person riding a bike can be broken down into a person and a bike. A person can be broken down into a muscular system, nervous system, circulatory system, etc.

Cybernetics is not the study of the entire system, but simply the study of the control portion of a system. "Control" simply means "that which

maintains homeostasis" or "that which regulates." It does not necessarily imply "authority." An old thermostat uses the expansion of different types of metals at different rates to coil or un-coil a bimetal coil in order to form an electrical connection when a minimum temperature is reached, and disconnect after the coil warms above this temperature. One can't really talk about the "authority" of a bimetal coil, but this is an example of a "control system."

"Viability" here means that a system has the ability to perpetuate or reproduce itself. In terms of a living thing, this simply means the system will "stay alive" or as long as other systems function. Assuming all functional organs outside of the nervous system, the body will continue to operate as long as the nervous system fulfills its set of functions. Thus the system is defined as "viable" within the context of the model. If a critical subsystem fails, such as the heart, the model doesn't really have anything to say about its impact on viability. The interactions of different components outside of the control system falls outside of the scope of this model.

The VSM is a tool to prevent and diagnose problems with the control of a system. It is not a grand unified model that can diagnose any problem with any system. Now that we've defined the scope of what we're talking about, let's talk briefly about some interesting history.

2 A brief History

Stafford Beer developed the VSM after being consulted by Salvador Allende's government in Chile to design a system called "CyberSyn." This system was central to a radically unique approach to socialist governance called "cybernetic socialism." CyberSyn would be a central bus and exception management system with the goal of creating a worker driven and highly participatory socialism. Critiques of statism aside, this was an interesting enough project to get Allende killed by the US government on September 11th 1973.

Jon Walker, a cooperative worker, asked Beer if the VSM could be used for cooperative governance and if it required "authority and obedience." Beer explained that it could be used for cooperatives and did not require what we might refer to as "coercive authority" or "obedience."

Walker went on to write a guide to the VSM for organizing cooperatives. This guide, titled "The VSM Guide for co-operatives and federations," includes analyses of a few organizations, and provides an overview of the VSM and methodology of using the VSM to analyze organizations.

In 2020, Thomas Swann picked up this thread and wrote a book called

"Anarchist Cybernetics." Anarchist Cybernetics recontextualized the VSM and related theory within radical organizing and activism. This text is an introduction to some ways this type of thinking can be valuable.

3 Overview of the VSM

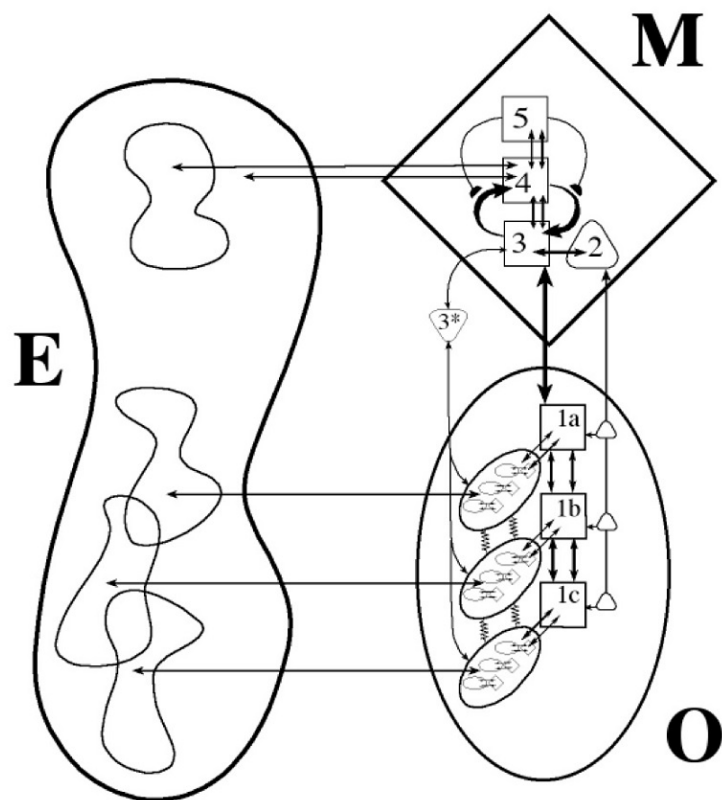


Figure 1: A diagram of the VSM. Amoeboid structure to the left is labeled "E", Diamond at the top right is labeled "M", ovoid at the bottom right is labeled "O". Arrows and numbers as described below.

Beer was a well known business consultant before his work became more radical. The VSM contains a functional hierarchy. While capitalist firms tend to conceptualize these as roles that overlap with the organizational hierarchy, Beer and others noted repeatedly later that function and orga-

nization were not the same. Rather, cybernetics predicts that an optimal system maximizes diffusion autonomy and minimizes hierarchy. Individuals within an organization may take multiple roles in different contexts. Organizational entities that fulfill functional units may be temporary as temporary as short-term committees or even just meetings. The following overview explains what a system must **do** not "how a system must be shaped."

The VSM has 5 subsystems (short descriptions from Jon Walker's VSM Guide):

1. **Operations:** This is the system that "does" everything. In the biological model it's the organs and muscles. In a mechanical model it's motors and actuators. In a business model, it's workers and machines. In a government, this would generally be executive agencies. For a nation, this is the working class.
2. **Conflict Resolution, Stability:** This is the system that ensures the smooth interaction of other systems. In the biological model this is the autonomic nervous system. In the mechanical model this is governors, regulators, and control logic. In a capitalist business, this would be management or HR, depending on the conflict. Different governments have different ways of handling (or not handling) this, but in the US this was the mythical "balance between the 3 branches of government." We'll touch on that again later. In a nation, this would often be a combination of law enforcement and the judiciary.
3. **Internal Regulation, Optimization, Synergy:** This is the system that keeps things going and identifies ways to improve things. In the biological model this probably also falls largely within the brain stem, including the autonomic nervous system, but also extends to functionality such as emotions and dreams that help drive subconscious behavior. This may or may not exist within the mechanical model, unless a machine integrates reinforcement based machine learning of some type. There is no consistent way capitalist businesses do this. Governments also have no consistent way of doing this, but the US government primarily puts this within the domain of the executive branch. Within a capitalist nation, this function has been largely fulfilled by capitalist markets. We will also touch on both of these later.
4. **Adaptation, Forward Planning, Strategy:** This is the system that models the environment within which it's operating and makes predictions from that model. In the biological model this is sensory

processing in sensory cortices, and modeling and planning in the frontal lobe. Mechanical models will also generally lack this, though there are some counterexamples of predictive machines. Capitalist businesses will do market research and regular planning. Capitalist planning may or may not involve employees outside of "leadership." We will explore how this manifests in governments and nations later.

5. **Policy, Ultimate Authority, Identity:** This is the system that defines the context within which all other systems operate. As anarchists, the concept of "ultimate authority" is likely to raise a lot of questions and concerns. But this is not a literal authority figure. Anarchism, as an ideology, can define the context within which we operate. Ideological assertions, like rejection of all non-consensual authority, can be the "Policies" by which we operate. The label "Anarchist," with or without adjectives, is an identity definition that is collectively defined and enforced without the need for a central authority figure. In the biological model, this is fulfilled by the frontal cortex. For mechanical models, this must be embedded in their design. Capitalist businesses often document policies and procedures, sometimes in manuals, along with tenants or principles. We will again talk about governments and their nations in the following section.

System 1 consists of a set of subsystem. These make up the "operations" group. Systems 2-5 make up a group called the "metasystem." Capitalists understand the world as "operations" being in service to the "metasystem." Leaders come up with ideas, and workers execute on those ideas. This reflects the feudal roots of capitalism, where the king is a "subject of God," and the people of the kingdom express God's as projected through him. This is the opposite of how the world is modeled within the VSM.

In the VSM, system 1 is the most important system. Nothing happens without it. The metasystem provides a set of services to the operations systems to enable them. The metasystem may go dormant when not needed. The metasystem isn't actively managing, it isn't a micro-manager. You don't think about how often your heart beats and rarely about when you take a breath or blink. Metasystem subsystems are activated by operations systems, operations systems do not serve the metasystem. While this feels hard to mesh with the popular concept of identity and how brains work, it's more true to the actual underlying science. . . like humans, no system exists within a vacuum.

The viability of a system is dependent on it's environment. The more chaotic the environment, the more important higher order functions. The

solar system remains viable because the forces that govern it, physics, are stable. The outer rim of the milky way galaxy is highly stable, meaning that system 4 is not really necessary. However, if a star or a black hole happened to wander in, the system would rapidly fall out of it's current homeostasis. When the sun exhausts it's energy in a few billion years, the system we know will fall out of homeostasis and will enter a new homeostasis. In some ways, the ability to carry out these predictions fulfill some elements of subsystem 4. If humans survive that long and develop an unimaginable technology, perhaps the system can remain viable in the face of more dynamic forces.

Specifically, authoritarian systems may lack or have suboptimal meta-systemic operation. Under some conditions, these system can remain viable. However, these systems critically fail in highly dynamic situations. This will be discussed in a future section.

The recursive nature of the VSM allows us to drill down on specific components to see if those components are themselves viable. This allows us to predict the failure modes of a larger system by understanding the failure modes of individual components. We can also analyze a system as a component of a larger system. We can model an affinity group as part of a federation as much as we can model a person as a member of an affinity group. There's nothing to stop us from modeling a person, within a department, within a collective corporation, operating within a federation of collectives, operating within a marketplace, managed by a government, which is itself part of a nation, which operates within the context of the world. We can then choose to specifically explore the viability of any level of this system, and the risks that could come from instability in other levels.

The recursive nature of this model also reveals some level of isomorphism (self-similarity) between different layers of components. Where isomorphism does exists, it may be possible to extend metaphors from one level to another. While an individual may have a deficit of executive functioning, so may an organization, where the manifested behavior of both is similar. While an individual may be self-absorbed, a nation may exhibit the same behavior when controlled by a dictator, and there may exist a mutually reinforcing causal interaction, a feedback loop, between the two.

The operational subsystem is itself a set of viable systems, which may also be made of viable systems, and so on, down to the individual human, tool, or human/tool combinations that are themselves viable systems. The metasystems may also themselves be viable systems, where the "operation" they perform is to produce a system control artifact (for example, a decision, a planning document, a constitution). These systems can operate under their own rules (subject to the identity and policies of the system for which they

perform metasytemic tasks). However, while operational subsystems must be themselves viable systems there is no such restriction on metasytems. A metasytem not need, nor should it often be, a persistent system. Rather metasytems could be meetings, mechanisms, processes, ideas, shared agreements, or ideologies. Metasytems need not even be coupled to, or have direct communication with, operations. But this is, perhaps, an analysis for another time.

The VSM provides us with a rich toolkit for understanding organizations, how to design them, flaws that can destroy them, how to fix flaws before they lead to the collapse of an organization, and which flaws may be unrecoverable.

4 The Death of a Nation

The ultimate viability of a government lies in the connection between the collective identity function of the nation it commands, and the internal identity function. A group of people define their own identity organically. If the identity of the people (say, "we live in a democracy") deviates from the perceived identity of the government ("this is a dictatorship"), government viability is at risk. Or, thought of another way, if the function of the metasytem (what it actually does) deviates from the function of the operational units (what everyone is trying to do within the system) then the system cannot remain viable.

A government is the metasytem of a governed nation. But systems always exist within the context of their environment. An otherwise non-viable system could be remain viable within a static context. Remember that the solar system remains viable without systems 4 and 5 because there are no external pressures destabilizing it. Inertia alone is enough to maintain homeostasis. All social relationships, governments included, are more dynamic than that. However, systems with limited or degraded viability can persist for a long time if they are either supported by external forces or are internally unchallenged. North Korea is essentially non-viable, but it remains due to regional support from China. US backed dictatorships that would otherwise be inviable remain in operation through constant US support. Putin's dictatorship remains viable, despite almost complete failure of the metasytem, because alternative systems have been suppressed.

Failures of the government, as a metasytem, can result in a less viable or non-viable governed nation, leading to invasion or subversion by external actors, or requiring external support. Other failure states at the national

level are population collapse, as is happening in South Korea right now. If the South Korean metasytem continues to fail to restrict immigration, the young population will be unable to economically sustain the old population, leading to complete social collapse.

Failure of metasytems within the government can lead to a national schism (if an equally viable, or more viable metasytem exists). The Syrian Civil War was an example of internal metasytemic failures leading to schism. Assad's government failed across multiple fronts, most salient for the revolution being the failure of system 4 (being unable to adapt to a climate change induced famine). Assad's government became regionally inviable while alternative systems that demonstrated they were able to adapt seized power. The Rojava Revolution remains an example of a dual power institution that was able to reject the dominant authority.

Nominally democratic governments may use votes and polls to identify high level strategic direction, though lobbying or bribes and mass surveillance tend to be larger drivers of behavior. These governments typically maintain power by manufacturing consent to minimize the schism between the national identity (what people think the metasytem does) and elite objectives (what the metasytem actually does).

In the decades prior to Trump, the Executive and the Judicial branches of the US government performed the operations of system 2, while the legislative performed systems 3 and 5. System 4 fell partially within the government, but was mostly outsourced to the capitalist market either in the form of lobbying and think tanks. Polling, focus groups, and gave the primary signals of shifts in popular identity, while voting provided other signals. Elites could then use these signals to either allow the US government to align with the popular identity or attempt to use elite controlled media to align the majority of the population towards elite objectives.

It's important here to note that I'm not necessarily talking about formal systems or organizations. Again, metasytems and subsystems don't need to actually be people or groups of people. There does not need to be an Illuminati for this type of control to manifest. This can (and in most cases is) an emergent behavior of the system rather than an intentional behavior. The system 5 for the US has, ostensibly, been the Constitution (until Trump broke that illusion). System 5 can be hijacked by elite without the need for a "deep state."

Elite interests for safety align with private transport. Elite projection limits the options that the masses see as viable. Elites make movies, fund projects, and sell ideas that align with their own interests, believing that everyone wants what they want. People, repeatedly seeing the same things,

believe those things to represent their own identities and interests. Thereby elites, without any conscious action or organization, can (and do) manipulate mass identity. (No fluoride required.)

But Trumpism has changed some things. Algorithmic media creates insular subcultures. Insular subcultures breed cults (like the array of cults supporting Trump). Cults are definitionally non-viable. Within a cult, system 5 (identity) is completely consumed by the cult leader. The cult leader has all authority. Policy does not exist, only the whims of the cult leader. The identity of the cult is the cult leader, nothing else.

The fragile ego of the cult leader requires the sacrifice of system 4 (adaptation and forward planning) because reality tends to conflict with the beliefs of the leader. The truth of the cult leader must be the global truth. Any truth that doesn't reflect the truth of the cult leader must be disregarded, must be destroyed. Starved of information, planning becomes impossible and, without planning, adaptation becomes impossible. There can be no system 3 (optimization and regulation) because that relies in introspection. Introspection is one thing that the cult leader cannot do, and therefore the cult (as the manifestation of the leader) cannot do. The cult leader must weaken or destroy system 2 (conflict resolution) in any case where it could threaten the cult leader's ultimate authority.

So the cult becomes ultimately inviable. It slowly degrades until either a dynamic situation an alternative option presents itself, at which point it catastrophically collapses. The only question is how many people it kills on the way.

5 Turboparalysis and Low Bandwidth Metasystems

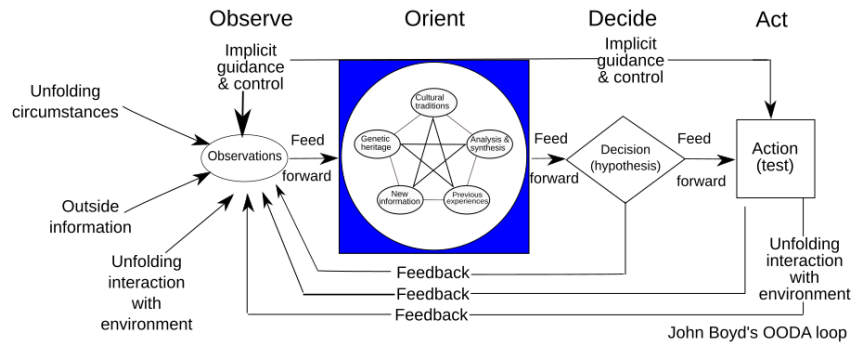


Diagram of the OODA loop

Natural disasters are especially hazardous to authoritarian governments. To

understand why, let's look at things through a bit of a different lens. The OODA loop is a decision making model developed by Air Force Colonel John Boyd. OODA stands for "observe," "orient," "decide," and "act." It's used extensively to model military, law enforcement, and disaster response, but is also common in the corporate world.

Within the OODA loop there are multiple opportunities to adjust direction. This feedback/adjust mechanism makes OODA decisions more agile. However, in some cases, that advantage can become a vulnerability. If the system can be overwhelmed with information, an organization can become trapped in the "Observe, Orient, Decide" loop without ever making a decision. When organizations that use a decision making system like OODA get stuck in these loops, they can either stay trapped within the loop and be unable to make any official decision, or they can be forced to make decisions on bad or no information. Both of these can manifest as "turboparalysis": the frantic, often conflicting, action without any results.

Now let's reconsider the OODA loop in the context of the VSM. The VSM recommends maximizing the autonomy of operational units. External observation and planning is a function of the metasystem, specifically systems 3 and 4. So within an optimally viable organization, according to the VSM, OODA mostly takes place within a tight system 3 and 4 loop before returning to operational units. It does so at the lowest level of recursion possible. In most cases, this means that the smallest group with the ability to orient and make decisions does execute the loop.

Organizations that maximize autonomy structurally by minimizing hierarchy are, by default, VSM optimal for decision making (if they are otherwise viable). Anarchist disaster response, for example, maximizes the autonomy of individual workers. Information may be shared to support system 3 and 4 within the larger org, but most decisions will stay within the domain of operational units. It is generally only in cases of conflict or observed optimization opportunities that the metasystems would be activated at all.

However, hierarchal organizations tend to centralize decision making. As the hierarchy becomes more strict, the autonomy of operational units decreases. For each level stripped of autonomy in a domain, OODA loop decisions must transition an additional level of (VSM) systemic recursion. Concretely, in an optimal VSM organization each individual is authorized to make any decision that will not endanger the viability of the larger system. Do you buy supplies? You decide, you already have a budget. The budget isn't enough, coordinate with others until you get enough people who agree to get the budget or until you are convinced otherwise. In a hierarchal organization, decisions are centralized. Do you buy supplies? Ask for a

budget allocation and give it to your manager. Your manager will relate that request to the regional manager. The regional manager will group this with other requests to present to the mid level finance committee. The finance committee will add it to the planning session for the budget next year, and so on.

The more strict the hierarchy, the more levels of hierarchy a decision must pass through. While it's bad enough just to go through more people, the other side is that each level of hierarchy decreases the communication bandwidth for the level above. Rather than making decisions locally, the metasystem has to manage communication for each operational unit below. Observations go up the chain. The observational bandwidth decreases at each level, so each step loses information on the way up (or doesn't make it up the chain at all). When observations reach a level authorized to make decisions, those decisions now have to travel back down the chain of command. Decisions can't be detailed and granular but must necessarily be general enough to be interpreted at each level back. This adds additional "orient and decide" steps prior to reaching the operational units able to act. Each level of ambiguity adds opportunities to misunderstand or misinterpret the generalized guidance. If guidance is made specific then other problems can arise, such as instructions being inappropriate for a given situation.

Hierarchical organizations may mitigate this problem by creating intelligence units with the specific purpose of gathering information (OODA observing) and processing it into intelligence (OODA orienting). Systems 3 (optimization) and 4 (adaptation and planning) still take place at higher levels, but this structure decreases the type of data loss described earlier. Downward data loss remains the same. But intelligence units cause a different type of data loss. Intelligence can provide highly detailed information on what intelligence analysts believe to be the most critical areas, but this high focus is at the expense of other areas. So a hierarchical organization can either have highly focused information on a small number of things, or a small amount of information about a lot of things, but never both.

As a situation becomes more dynamic, observation and orientation takes up more bandwidth. There are necessarily more observations and more things for which to orient. The degree to which an organization can manage dynamic situations (natural disasters, asymmetric warfare) is an inverse to both how dynamic the situation is and how hierarchical the organization is. Therefore, anarchist disaster response like Occupy Sandy and MADR (Mutual Aid Disaster Relief) excel in disasters while FEMA collapses. Likewise, guerilla and other asymmetric forces regularly defeat highly organized militaries like that of the US.

As an organization moves even further on the hierarchy scale even more problems arise. Authoritarianism ultimately collapses the entire metasystem into leaders (as described earlier). These leaders are not chosen for their competence but for their ideological adherence and loyalty to the leader. Ideological adherence necessarily creates an observational filter, making some observation and orientation functions impossible. It is not possible for authoritarian governments to be optimally viable, by definition, for multiple reasons. Critical to this section is the fact that they cannot actually observe and plan when those observations and plans may conflict with the beliefs of "Dear Leader."

6 Collapse, Competition, and Dual Power

Speculative fiction has, again and again, imagined worlds where Fascism was not defeated, where Hitler did not lose. But these worlds were always impossible. The nature of authoritarianism leads to its own collapse. As climate change increases the probability of natural disasters, hierarchal organizations will be less and less able to grapple with the consequences.

As the Syrian Civil War showed us, if regimes will fail to adapt then counter-power can replace them. Assad's government was incapable of adapting to the drought and subsequent events that lead to the civil unrest that marked the beginning of the Syrian Revolution. When the state failed to ensure the supply of bread, alternative institutions stepped in. Both liberatory (Rojava) and oppressive forces (ISIS) were able to seize power. Assad's government, though it took more than a decade, ultimately succumbed to the limitations of its own authoritarianism.

As climate change continues to increase the likelihood of natural disaster, thereby increasing the complexity of the environment, authoritarianism becomes less and less viable. Meanwhile, as instability drives fear governments are able to move further towards authoritarianism. Authoritarianism, in and of itself, erodes and ultimately destroys the state. The decay begins with pro-social elements (environmental protection, financial support, healthcare, disaster preparedness) in order to preserve the mechanisms of violence at all costs. But even the mechanisms of violence ultimately collapse.

Within the context of the VSM, Neoliberalism (and the fascism that inevitably follows) can be thought of as the state removing its operational units. That is, it's destroying the value production on which the entire system is built. Whole this may conjure a right libertarian fantasy where governments compete for tax dollars in a capitalist marketplace, this absur-

dity is wrapped around a kernel of truth. While money is one manifestation of power, wrapped in capitalist mythology to hide its authoritarian function, the underlying choice to align or not align with a power structure (allegiance) is real.

A state that fails to provide services that people want (or expect) may struggle to collect taxes from its population. While the US can print money because the US dollar is a global reserve currency, even that position is based on an underlying "legitimacy" and perceived stability. As the population rejects the legitimacy of a government that, say, viably rejects its constitution and dismantles social safety nets, that government will struggle and may very well collapse.

As mentioned earlier, the VSM is a recursive model. A government can be either a viable or inviable entity in and of itself, and can also be the metasytem of, or have metasytemic functions within, a larger viable or inviable entity (a nation). The failure of the metasytem of a nation can bring the collapse of operational units that rely on systemic stability. Within national systems of state/capital, regulation and taxation are metasytemic functions. One core function of the capitalist state is to create and manage markets (the housing market, the labor market, the intellectual property market, the carbon credit market, etc). Within the capitalist state, markets can be modeled as operational units with regulatory agencies acting as the policy engine of the metasytem.

Improper or lack of regulation can lead to the collapse of these markets. (We will ignore, in this text, conversations about the feasibility of government regulation as a concept and simply pretend that the concept is possible.) Taxation (such as tariffs) and fiscal policy can act as regulations within these markets.

For example, regulations, tariffs, and taxes on tea and other goods in the lead up to the American Revolution weakened these markets and opened up a black market for those goods. This black market developed as a dual power, coexisting with the regulated colonial market. It's no coincidence that several of the "founding fathers" were smugglers or had connections to smugglers. Nor was it a coincidence that attacks on smugglers turned people against The Crown.

The logistic infrastructure of The Revolution was the logistic infrastructure of the people, as The Crown attacked that infrastructure, those attacks actually bolstered The Revolution. One can frame this another way. The metasytem of The Crown failed to understand what colonists wanted. It directed its operational units to offer a service that wasn't wanted by the colonizers. The failure of this metasytem made it impossible for the op-

erational units to extract money and maintain legitimacy. Meanwhile, the oppositional metasystem correctly identified the needs of the colonizers and the operational units of that metasystem provided that value. Therefore the opposition, by providing services, extracted money and built legitimacy.

Che Guevara's Guerilla Warfare can be analyzed in a similar way. Guerilla warfare centers the Revolutionary Program. Guerilla warfare, as a strategy, is not overthrowing the state in order to institute a revolutionary program. Rather it is using attacks as a means to immediately institution the revolutionary program in liberated areas. Liberated areas then support guerilla forces in maintaining and expanding the revolutionary program. The metasystem of the revolutionary program identifies the needs of the people and aligns operational units to fulfill those needs. A guerilla force as an operational unit, for example, may expropriate land and give that land to the workers. In doing so, the counter-power exchanges actions (attacking plantation owners, police, military, etc) for legitimacy and material support. Guerilla warfare is a revolutionary program with an insurrectionary operational unit. It is not an insurrectionary system that happens to be supported by a revolutionary operation to support it.

The strategy described by Guevara was to carry out this program in the country around a city, then to attack the logistics of the city in order to cause the collapse of the dominant authority within the city. That is, grow counter-power around a city by competing for legitimacy within the rural space. When established, leverage the domination of this counter-power around the city to force the collapse of the dominant system within cities. As the dominant power weakens within cities, counter-power can out-compete and ultimately supplant it.

In the stability of the past, revolutionaries could only imagine supplanting state power through insurrection and guerilla warfare. In the age of polycrisis and authoritarian rigidity, state power may bring its own collapse when nature doesn't do the job.

7 Disaster Preparedness against Disaster Capitalism

It is at this point that we must discuss important two facts:

1. It is easier to raise an insurrection to defend systems people want, than it is to build systems that people want during an insurrection.

2. A sufficiently advanced disaster preparedness and response program is indistinguishable from a revolutionary counter-power.

The United States military is, first and foremost, a logistics machine. The combat capabilities of military forces university relies on providing soldiers with what they need to continue fighting. This has been true for more than two thousand years since Sun Tzu said, "The line between disorder and order lies in logistics."

The primary focus of wars between regular armies is logistic infrastructure. The primary focus of US forces during the Vietnam War was the destruction of the Ho Chi Mihn trail (not actually a trail, but a dynamic logistic network that included multiple trails where supplies were moved primarily by bicycle). Carpet bombing and defoliation was not able to destroy this network. Ultimately North Vietnamese soldiers were able to attack core US supply lines (also, heavily employing bicycles, interestingly enough), leading to the catastrophic collapse of US and US backed forces and a rapid withdrawal of US troops.

While logistics are the core of military strategy, the need for resources grows as oppositional pressure mounts. Revolutionary attacks are, by definition, illegal. Revolutionary forces must exist outside of the dominant system. This means that a counter-power system is immediately necessary after the very first confrontation with the dominant system. A revolutionary movement needs above ground (legal) and an underground (illegal) elements in order to fulfill it's requirements. It is difficult or impossible to build above ground power while operating completely underground.

If, however, a revolutionary program can develop above ground viability first, then it can maintain above ground ties as parts of it fall in to legal gray areas (or completely in to the territory of illegal activity). This brings us to our second fact. Disaster preparedness means preparing for, at the very least, short term systemic collapse. A rural windstorm can knock out power for days or weeks. This temporarily disconnects a group of people from one element of the dominant system. In the interim, these people must rely on other systems: their own, or a local disaster prep network. Basic disaster preparedness means being prepared to replace the dominant system with an alternative system for (at least) a short period of time.

As a disaster preparedness program develops, it can consider more and more complex scenarios that require larger and longer term responses. A more advanced disaster preparedness program would look at the whole set of services offered by the operational units of the dominant system and identify more resilient replacement systems. These replacement systems can and

should operate in parallel to those of the dominant system in order to develop and prove their resilience. An even more advanced disaster preparedness program still could identify opportunities to fulfill needs that are not currently fulfilled by the dominant system.

This is already developing in the US today as the illegalization of trans and reproductive healthcare eliminates the ability of the dominant system to fulfill those needs. Here, illegalism saves lives and demonstrates the viability of alternative systems. The failure of the state to regulate the housing market to fulfill the needs of the population has left multiple needs unmet for many people. People can be left without food, shelter, and sanitation. These mirror the needs of those impacted by natural disasters (some, in fact, are disaster refugees who are unserved by the dominant system). Systems that provide long-term support houseless camps outside of the dominant system are necessarily building a system that works for those for whom the dominant system does not work.

A sufficiently advanced disaster preparedness and response program is prepared for the eventuality of the Neoliberal dismantling of the state, the collapse of capitalism itself, and the rise of fascism and tech feudalism. It must be prepared to provide for those who will be left behind, to protect those who will suffer, and also to defend, by any means necessary, those who are targeted. It must be able to do so in a sustainable way. It must be prepared to carry out revolution, if needed, because these eventualities all fall within the scope of disaster preparedness. The revolutionary capability simply extends naturally from the ability to maintain order (or create a better order) in the face of state withdrawal, as is common during all forms of disaster (natural and human created).

8 Disaster Anarchism as Viable Systems in an Increasingly Dynamic Environment

A disaster preparedness approach strategy of counter-power has a few added advantages for anarchists:

1. It is prefigurative.
2. It scales well.
3. It is plausibly deniable (and therefore invisible).

An insurrection-first approach immediately creates conflict. Even if it's easy to argue that this conflict was already in existence and asymmetric,

insurrection centers this symmetry and escalates. The resultant system is a conflict system. It's purpose is destruction. If the conflict system somehow succeeds, it must then change it's form and pivot to a creation system. It must pivot from destroying the old society to building the new one.

A disaster preparedness approach centers creation. It builds the new society "in the shell of the old." Conflict is not the purpose of the system, but is a subsystem that it develops to preserve the primary function. The disaster preparedness system is a machine that produces and maintains systems to fulfill it's purpose of creating a resilient society. (It just happens to be fortunately true that an egalitarian society is also a resilient one.) The disaster preparedness system could, hypothetically, succeed without conflict and thus never need to develop a conflict subsystem. Not engaging in conflict is necessarily easier, allowing more resources to be devoted to creation. However, if conflict does become inevitable it's already built to develop systems that manage threats. When threats to the system are neutralized, the disaster preparedness system doesn't need to change it's fundamental purpose and frantically reorganize itself in a power vacuum. Rather, the disaster preparedness system has always been built to fill a power vacuum and seamlessly transitions to being the dominant system.

Disaster preparedness can start at any scale and seamlessly scale up. Having water, food, and comrades in a disaster increases survivability and comfort over not having those things. Even the smallest and most basic system is helpful. Planet killing asteroids, power-grid destroying solar flares, global nuclear war, pandemics, and, of course, climate change, are all within the scope of disaster preparedness and response. These would, and do, require a global response. Climate change is a global disaster that can only be addressed by **both** the rapid disassembly of capitalism and a global effort to mitigate the massive damage that has already been done. Every step, every action, from the first to the last provides additional value to everyone involved. It is better to be prepared for disaster than not. It is better to be able to provide and receive mutual aid during a disaster than not. It is better to build systems to prevent disaster than not. Every step provides more value by working together than working alone.

In the age of polycrisis, even states promote (a specific type of) disaster preparedness. The right wing version of "the prepper movement" centers individualism and consumption: get a gun, buy this tool, build a bunker, etc. It overlaps almost entirely with the right wing militia movement for very similar reasons to those already described (and others that don't need to be discussed). To right wing preppers, the concept of disaster prep is normal and therefore invisible. To the corporations, "preppers" are a market so disaster

prep is a good thing. To statist, disaster prep means "sustaining society during crisis to hold space for the state to return." No one imagines it as a threat. It's difficult for the state to argue that disaster preparedness is bad when it is actively creating and mismanaging so many disasters. Rather, the state offloads the responsibility of disaster response to the individual. Therefore, disaster anarchism can take on the appearance of aligning with the interests of the state.

Even open threats, such as the stabilization and support of houseless camps, there are plausible deniable reasons why disaster prep would want to do such things. ("Houseless camps give us practice supporting displaced people, so the tactics we're using here are really about preparing for other natural disasters... not helping marginalized people survive and build their own counter-power. Definitely not actually building a system to include people who are excluded by the existing one.") Literally no one opposes disaster preparedness because it's so obviously valuable. It is so tightly aligned with the interests of regular people, that even doing so would alienate the population and radicalize people further **against** any state that opposed it.

9 Towards a Cyber-Memetic Model of Revolution

While the VSM was developed primarily to assess viability of systems within capitalist markets, authority is one level of abstraction removed from that. Whereas the money is a primary factor of the fitness of an entity within the market, the currency of authority is in the memetic space: legitimacy. It is **belief** about the relative viability of a system, rather than a quantifiable measure of the viability of the system, that determines the success or failure of a revolutionary project. Perception is a function of viability, assessed within the VSM, but perception is not itself VSM viability.

This gives us 4 factors of revolution within this model:

1. The viability of the dominant system
2. The viability of the revolutionary system
3. the environment within which these systems compete
4. the memetic space of the interactions of the previous 3

Then, within this model, revolution occurs when the dominant power is perceived as not optimally viable, and the perception of the viability of a

counter-power exceeds the perception of the viability of the dominant power. As people choose to participate in the counter-power and reject participation in the formerly dominant power, the dominant power collapses and the counter-power becomes the dominant power.

The ability or inability to project viability is a function of the actual viability of a system, but is not determined directly by the actual viability of said system. While a collapsed system that cannot ensure the population has food also cannot pretend food into existence, propaganda can minimize the impact of this fact by hiding it from some portions of the population. Viability is a function of the environment, which for each power, includes the alternate. A counter-power is part of the dominant power's environment, and vice versa, mutually affecting systematic viability of each.

Critically here, a system is measured by it's function, not it's intention. To have revolutionary potential, the oppositional system must be the same class of system. A system that blows up oil infrastructure, for example, would be an environmental factor that would absolutely negatively impact the viability of the dominant system. However, that system is a different class of system than the dominant system. It would have no revolutionary potential in and of itself. It may weaken the dominant system, it may starve the machinery of oppression of vital resources, but it can't bring that system's collapse. The urban guerilla movement never threatened the dominant power structure. Rather, these groups increased the power of the state because they were the wrong class of organization to challenge it.

The purpose of the capitalist state is to prop up the capitalist order, to maintain property rights, and to otherwise maintain existing systems of oppression. But the perceived class of the system is determined by the function relative to the environment. The state is the metasystem of a given nation. Metasystems organize systems to fulfill needs. To replace the dominant metasystem, the revolutionary system must be the same perceived class (which isn't to say it must **do** the same things, but that it must fulfill the same systemic niche).

The Black Panther's Free Breakfast Program was more dangerous than any other thing they did, because it did what people thought the state should do. While the perceived function of the state is to organize people to fulfill needs, it usually fails to do so since this is not it's actual function. The Free Breakfast Program highlighted this disconnect. The state then adopted a similar program, after destroying the Panthers, in order to again obscure the actual function the state fulfills.

The state cannot ever be optimally viable within it's perceived systemic niche because (1) because of hierarchy it can't be optimally viable at all,

and (2) the perceived systemic niche (organizing the people to optimally fulfill the needs of the people) is literally the opposite of it's actual function (perpetuation of hierarchy and thus prevention of needs fulfillment for some).

The VSM provides us a rich toolkit to analyze both the vulnerabilities of systems we oppose, and the viability of systems we propose to build in opposition. It hints at weakness and opportunities. It appropriately positions our thinking within the context of other systems and the environment. It gives us tools to control complexity and leverage that complexity to our advantage. This reading of the VSM tells us that if we build a more viable counter-power, we will win, given that we spend the time to actually understand what "viability" means.